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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the use of portfolios for teacher evaluation reviews common uses of portfolios in higher education and offers suggestions for portfolio construction. It is noted that portfolios are frequently used for evaluation of both learner and teacher performance, as a means of documenting an individual's capabilities and skills. Some applications include: student and professional use of collections of work in the fine arts; student use to document learning in subject areas at all educational levels and in teacher education; as a means of assessment, in lieu of traditional comprehensive examinations, at the end of a master's degree program; for assessment of language majors' accomplishment of specific educational objectives; and as an alternative to conventional supervision of teachers. When used by teachers, portfolios promote reflective thinking on teaching practice. Despite initial skepticism, teachers and administrators often find them useful. Use of mentors is strongly recommended to guide teachers in portfolio construction. Other desirable factors include administrative support, collaboration among teachers experienced with portfolios, teacher workshops in their use, communication, availability of a variety of examples of portfolio types, implementation without pressure, and clearly defined guidelines. Six steps in portfolio construction and use are outlined. (MSE)

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# The Use of Portfolios for Teacher Evaluation

What is a portfolio? A portfolio is an accumulation of documents that best describe a teacher's strengths and philosphies. Seldin defines portfolios as, "a factual description of a professor's major strengths and teaching achievements. It describes documents and materials which collectively suggest the scope and quality of a professor's teaching performance. It is to teaching what lists of publications, grants, and honors are to research and scholarship" (Seldin 1991: 3). The documents or componets for a portfolio can include recommendations from faculty, students or administration, student evaluation results, videos of classes taught, publications, works of students, philosophy statement of the teacher, syllabi, conference presentations, or documention of involvement in professional groups. The components can be any document that illustrates the strengths of the teacher.

Originally portfolios were and still are used in the area of fine arts. Students created portfolios which contained a variety of art work in hopes of entering an art institution or giving a perspective employer a realistic idea of their capabilities and skills. Even after graduating and securing a job, people such as commercial artists, photographers, architects, or theatrical artists use

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portfolios to get better jobs or an advancement in the job market. Some universities or fine art schools use portfolios as one of the necessary requirements for entrance into their institution to give the institution an idea of the quality of art work the prospective student is capable of doing and also serves as a basis of evaluation.

More and more educational institutions are incorporating portfolios in all levels of education. Portfolios have been used successfully in reading, writing, science, art, social studies, history, and teacher education. They have been incorporated at all levels of education from elementary to higher education. This same idea is practiced in Canada but is known as a "teaching dossier". Moore comments that portfolios "allow for self-directed work, self-correction, greater autonomy and greater time frames" (Moore 1994: 176). The teacher or student is able to select what is of most interest to the individual, creating more motivation in the learning process. The reason for this increased use of portfolios is because of the success people have found. Opinions also indicate that teachers are happy with portfolios because of the personal growth and professional development acquired. They record growth and development of teachers or students over periods of time.

Universities use portfolios as a means of assessment at the end of a master's program instead of the traditional comprehension exams. Their use helps students better prepare themselves in the quest of a job in the real world, promotes reflection on their beliefs of teaching, and fosters professional growth of students. Success has been evident using portfolios instead of the traditional final comprehensive exams that often require memorization of facts.

Portfolios are used in an assessment plan for foreign language majors. This assessment plan takes a good look at standards, goals, and expectations

of the student. Standards are set for students entering and leaving this foreign language program. Elements of these student portfolios might include: entry-level examination, examples of papers written in the target language, oral-production on tape, journal writing in the target language, samples of creative writing, videotaped activities of the student using the target language, and any other related documentation. Goals and expectations are clearly outlined for the incoming students, and students are held responsible for themselves and their learning. Lewis comments on the expected realizations of students with, "The assessment process brings about a shift in focus from what teachers "want" of students to what students want for themselves, encouraging a sense of empowerment of students" (Lewis 1990: 38). The philosophy of this assessment plan is seen in the following quote:

> The focus on the process of assessment rather than on the products implies that any group embarking on a comparable project has to define its own objectives, chart its own course, and measure its own progress according to local circumstances. (Lewis 1990: 38)

Portfolios have been used as an alternative to the traditional supervision of teachers. Some administrators and teachers have not been satisfied with the use of clinical supervision as a means of evaluation and have adopted the use of portfolios in hopes of finding an alternative that would benefit the teachers and administrators in the area of professional development. The use of portfolios fosters communication between administrators and teachers and is based upon the trust of both groups. Graham comments, "The portfolios policy affirms that teachers are active learners engaged in the process of perfecting their craft through reflection and action based on the results of that reflection" (Graham 1991: 8). Because

each teacher is an individual, professional growth is the responsibility of each teacher. The following excerpts are opinions from the teachers in Winnipeg, Canada concerning the use of portfolios:

> The focus now is on teacher responsibility and serves as an invitation for growth . . . Since all teachers and administrators are expected to keep a portfolio and write an annual statement of growth, all of us are implicated in the policy. . . It's better than an arbitrary check list of teaching skills and it promotes meaningful dialogue about real issues. . . My greatest concern is that the "process" will get lost in the "product". I have faith that the Portfolio Team will continue their efforts to help or facilitate educators grapple with the process of portfolio versus the "portfolio" itself. . . (Graham 1991: 10-13)

From these comments one can see the accomplishments of the program along with the progression of reflective thinking that has been documented. The use of portfolios is a process and product together which enables the teacher to document personal development in the area of teaching. Both administrators and teachers work together rather than against each other with the use of portfolios.

Portfolios create an 'ambiance' that promotes self-reflection by the teacher. Teachers begin to examine their attitudes about teaching and in this course they begin to evaluate themselves. Questions are asked by the teacher about him or herself, promoting self-reflection. Along with reflective thinking comes the growth of critical thinking. Portfolios let teachers reflect about their profession and monitor their progress. The use of writing journals can be incorporated by the teacher as a way to document ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. This documentation also fosters reflective thinking. These

thoughts later cause the teacher to come to self-realizations about what was written. Writing is also a way for the teacher to discover aspects of teaching that he or she may not have thought about if these aspects had not been documented.

Because the use of portfolios is new, teachers and administrators are often pessimistic of its value. With experience, this opinion usually changes. Considerable time needs to be taken into account for the creation of portfolios along with the evaluation of them. Time is needed for the teacher to think about philosophies and attitudes concerning teaching. Teachers find it difficult to put in words how they feel or the reflections they have. However, documentation is helpful because ideas and thoughts are written down and can be reviewed at a later date. This writing lets the teacher contemplate with time.

The use of mentors is strongly suggested to guide teachers in the construction of portfolios. Collaborative relationships between the teacher and mentor help answer doubts and questions about the use of portfolios. The mentor can be from outside the institution or from within depending upon the needs of the teacher. A fellow teacher, specialist in this area, department chair, or an older experienced member of the faculty can act as a mentor if they are knowledgeable in the area of portfolios. "The consultations that go into selecting material for the portfolio are perhaps the most valuable part of the process" according to Seldin and associates (Seldin 1993a: 45). The role of the mentor is important for the success of this process; mentors must be trained and be familiar with the use of portfolios. Sufficient and suitable coordination is necessary for teachers and administrators.

It has been suggested that administration support is necessary in order to succeed with the use of portfolios. Both administrators and teachers must

be able to work together. This technique is often criticized because it requires more work and time on the part of the teacher. However portfolios liberate teachers, promote professional growth, and let teachers decide about their own evaluation. In a sense teachers have more control over the evaluation of themselves and they are then thereby empowered.

Portfolios can be tested by a few experienced and good teachers over a period of time. Collaboration of fellow teachers and those who have experience in this area should be recommended. Workshops that educate teachers and inform them of this use are needed. As always communication is a prime element which will make or break the successfulness of portfolios. Examples of different types of portfolios should be studied and made available for administration and teachers. Implementation should be done carefully and without pressure.

Guidelines concerning portfolio formation and evaluation need to be defined clearly in order to create a basis for their use. Problems of size or length of components are troublesome but should be considered by administrators and teachers when defining the guidelines of portfolios. Once there is a clear understanding of the goals of the institution, department, community, and teachers, the use of portfolios can be implemented. The experience gained by using portfolios will answer questions and resolve problems concerning their use.

Moore suggests four steps for the creation of portfolios which are: selecting, planning, organizing, and producing. She continues to describe the creation as a type of formative evaluation and "the portfolio is also a type of summative evaluation because it enables the teachers and students to see the final products of the learning experiences" (Moore 1994: 178). Seldin gives six steps concerning the creation of portfolios which include:

1. Definition and clarification of teaching responsibilities
2. Selection of components of the portfolio
3. Preparation of statements for each component
4. Arrangement of components in order
5. Collection Support Data
6. Integration of Portfolio into Curriculum Vitae (Seldin 1991: 7-8)

First, teachers begin by defining what their responsibilities are in class and in related activities. Information about classes that are being and have been taught by the teacher is organized. Then components that show these responsibilities are selected, and prepared statements concerning each component are written. Next the teacher logically arranges these components and also compiles any other materials which would serve as extra components available upon request. Along with these steps, collaboration with a mentor is advised to help the teacher in the refining and creating of portfolios. It has been suggested that a few experienced teachers test the creation of portfolios with caution and gradually include more teachers in the process.

The use of portfolios is not the perfect answer to the assessment of teachers, but in this age of accountability this technique is more complete and gives a more complex view of what a teacher is like. Lewis' defines assessment as "to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of a broadly defined object or target group" (Lewis 1990: 35). Portfolios is a way to evaluate teachers effectively and fairly. Graham summarizes the philosophy with, "By changing the focus of evaluation from documentation and recording of performance to a process in which performance documents become a means to improve practice, the new policy (portfolios) places power in the hands of teachers" (Graham 1991: 28). Portfolios foster professional growth of

individual teachers which in turn fosters growth of the institution. Lastly it will hopefully foster growth in the area of education.

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